



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro

As prepared delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 15, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you Ambassador Badescu.

First, I would like to praise Ambassador Badescu and her Mission for the fine work they are doing. It's been only nine months since independence for Montenegro, and I think it is important to recall the role that our organization played, especially in preparing for the referendum and also observing the referendum, and the confidence that that gave to the people of Montenegro and the outcome of the results of that process.

You have done a fine job, Madame Ambassador, summarizing in your written report Montenegro's recent achievements, its principal challenges, and the Mission's recent involvement with both.

We very much share your view that the overall trends in Montenegro have remained positive since the country achieved independence last June. The country appears to have set a firm course towards integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, and European integration has become the most unifying issue in both politics and society.

To achieve those goals, Montenegro has adopted considerable legislation of high quality which meets international standards. Your Mission has contributed to many of these successes, and deserves our support.

We are similarly encouraged by Montenegro's efforts to establish constructive and cooperative relations with all of its neighbors. Efforts to settle pending issues with Serbia and Croatia have contributed to regional stability, and we welcome the constructive approach the country has taken with respect to the issue of Kosovo's future status.

Economic growth is encouraging, inflation remains under control, and foreign direct investment is improving. Montenegro has joined NATO's Partnership-for-Peace and is moving quickly to set up modern, democratic defense structures. Its record of cooperation with ICTY is positive.

While Montenegro should feel justly proud of its recent accomplishments, many tough challenges still lie ahead. Organized crime and corruption remain a source of major concern, and Montenegro is in the early phase of implementing newly adopted laws, particularly anti-corruption and anti-organized crime legislation. We fully support the Mission's efforts to support implementation of Montenegro's National Strategy and Action Plan Against Corruption and Organized Crime.

We welcome the Government's recent announcement of new measures to combat money laundering in the real estate sector. Nevertheless, we urge Montenegro to take further concrete steps to combat money laundering and to strengthen surveillance and control over monetary flows into the country.

We believe de-politicizing the judiciary and improving the qualifications of new judges should remain a priority, as public opinion polls routinely show a lack of confidence in the courts. We appreciate the institutional and expert support the Mission is providing to Montenegrin judges and prosecutors as well as the Mission's assistance in helping to monitor the courts. We believe the OSCE Mission should continue to support those initiatives which seek to raise judicial standards, to strengthen judicial independence, and to limit political influence on the courts.

Police accountability is another area for further work. In this respect, we would note that promoting police reform and providing police training is a major part of what the Mission does. We believe the Police Affairs Program is doing vital work in helping Montenegro develop a more professional, democratic, and capable force.

We particularly value the regular and specialized police training the Mission is providing through its Police Training Center in Danilovgrad.

We also attach high importance to the Mission's efforts to bring the police closer to the public it serves through community policing programs, as well as the assistance it is providing in developing an Internal Affairs Department.

We also encourage Montenegro to take steps to ensure equitable economic growth and development, particularly in non-coastal areas and the northern half of the country.

We agree that the overall role and work of the national parliament must be improved. We support and commend the Mission for the work it is doing to help the parliament modernize and improve its capacity to review legislation and exert effective oversight over the government and other state institutions.

We similarly support the Mission's efforts to help local self-government become more professional and responsive and accountable to their constituents.

We are also enthusiastic about the efforts of the Mission to more fully involve civil society actors in the decision-making processes at the central and local levels of government by improving their lobbying and advocacy skills.

Finally, we applaud the Government's and Parliament's efforts to create an inclusive and open process for drafting a new constitution, and call on Montenegro's political leadership to invest renewed energy and determination to reach final agreement on a constitution. We look to our Mission to support those efforts, especially in ways that bring transparency and inclusiveness to the process.

In conclusion, Ambassador Badescu, allow me to compliment the Mission for the active and constructive role it is playing in helping Montenegro to address the challenges I have just mentioned, as well as others. With a total staff of only 45 international and local employees, you are proving that a field mission needn't be large to have a meaningful and positive impact on a participating State's democratic and economic development, particularly where there is a will from the government and the people to move forward. We congratulate you and your staff for the solid contributions you are making and encourage you to keep up the fine work.

Thank you.